

THE GOLDEN LAMP AND ITS GOODLY LESSONS

NO. 1569

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What see you? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof...And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Know you not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”
Zechariah 4:1-3, 12-14.

THE prophet, as he tells us in the introduction to his vision, had to be awakened by the angel as one is awakened out of his sleep. His mind was dull and heavy, perhaps he was weary and worn. Do you not often feel a similar lethargy, from which you need to be roused before your mind is equal to the study of those truths which God is revealing to your soul? May it not then be well, at the commencement of our meditation, to pray the Lord to waken us as a man is wakened out of his sleep? A divinely mysterious power can brood over us and quicken us out of languor. Have you never felt it? “Or ever I was aware my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.” I had been slow before, but when the Spirit came, then was fulfilled that ancient proverb, “Draw me, and I will run after you.”

The touch of the Holy Spirit makes our faculties strong, our powers of thought are greatly enlarged, and we get the key to mysteries which we never had been able to unlock before. Come, blessed Spirit, then, to each one of Your slumbering children at this good hour, and arouse us, that we may see what You would set before us! Like young Samuel, whom You did call in his sleep, we would each one heartily say, “Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.”

Beloved friends, we live in a world which is naturally shrouded in darkness. The “prince of this world,” “the prince of the power of the air” is a dark spirit loving ignorance and sin. This darkness hovers over all the world as it did over Egypt, a darkness that might be felt is upon the souls of men. We sometimes fear that this gloom will thicken into an awful midnight. When we mix up with men in the ordinary avocations of life, and hear their profane language, when we see the angry passions, the earthly propensities, and the worldly policies that prevail among people who are held in repute among their fellow creatures, if we are children of God ourselves we cannot fail to be distressed that the world should still be so benighted and so destitute of that knowledge which purifies the heart.

Nearly nineteen hundred years have passed since the blessed feet of our divine Master touched this globe, and yet it still smokes beneath the hoof of the wicked one. The sun has risen on this Egypt, and yet a miserable midnight covers the guilty people. We are apt, therefore, to become somewhat desponding, lest the light of the knowledge of God should gradually wane, till at length it shall utterly die out. What, then, would become of the world? If the one golden candlestick were taken out of its place, if those who are the light of the world should all be removed, and if the sure word of prophecy,

which is like unto a light that shines in a dark place, should become extinct, what then would be the horrible darkness?

Now, I think the vision of Zechariah may remove all fear on that score. Rest you well assured that the pharos which God has lighted to guide men across the boisterous sea and preserve them from the peril of eternal shipwreck shall have its lamps trimmed throughout all time. Until the “Sun of righteousness” shall rise, that lantern shall never go out, for the Lord will take care that the light shall still shine notwithstanding all that the powers of darkness may do or devise to extinguish it. This one thought I beseech you so to grasp that it may strengthen your faith and comfort your hearts, the light of God’s grace has been kindled never to be quenched. To this end I invite your attention to the interesting parable contained in the marvelous vision which Zechariah the prophet beheld and described.

I. First, turn aside and see this great sight. Look, I beseech you, at THE WONDERFUL LAMP WHICH GOD HAS PROVIDED TO LIGHT THE SONS OF MEN.

“He said unto me, What see you? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to his seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof.” Here is a candlestick that must challenge the notice of all who gaze at it, for it is of costly material and curious form, the work of wisdom, fitted for the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. It resembles the candlestick whose pattern Moses received from God, and yet in some respects it differs therefrom, as we shall see.

The object is scarcely more remarkable than its position. Note that *it stood in the open*. Under the old covenant the candlestick stood within curtains where only priestly eyes might see it, from the mass of the people it was hidden. We are very apt to think that because the Jewish ritual was full of symbols, the worship of the people must have been of so materialistic a character that there was little or nothing to raise the soul to spiritual adoration of the invisible One. But it was not so, to the average Israelite there was little more of symbol than to us.

Although it is true that within the holy place there were many symbols, yet there were very few of God’s people who ever saw one of them, and most probably we ourselves know far more about the types than the Jews ever did. The worship was not visible to the camp, for it was within an enclosed space, and when the people were settled in Canaan the actual temple area could only hold a few of the vast multitudes who inhabited the land. Within the holy place of all, the “Holy of Holies,” no man ever entered except the high priest, and he but once in the year, so that they who worshipped God in the further parts of Palestine would for the most part not even see the Tabernacle or the Temple, and when they did go up to Jerusalem they rather believed that the symbols were inside behind the veil than inquired for the furniture and sacred vessels as if they might be allowed to inspect them. Their worship had less of the visible about it than we are apt to imagine, for most of the material emblems were simply certified to them by testimony, and not otherwise verified to their senses.

Then, as if to let us know that the light of God did not yet fully shine among men, and that the fullness of grace and truth had not been yet revealed, seeing Christ had not come, the seven-branched golden candlestick stood out of sight of the mass of the people, shut in within the curtains, enclosed within the holy place. But the lamp which Zechariah saw was in the open air, about this we are quite clear, because he saw two olive trees growing, one on each side of it. It was, therefore, in an open space.

Today, beloved, “the veil of the temple is rent in twain.” What was mystery before has become plain to us now. Now we see Jesus, and seeing Jesus, we behold a light such as never greeted the eyes of prophets and kings. Though they longed to behold it they died without the sight. Let us take care that we keep this lamp in the open, do not let us suffer anyone to shut it up. Let the Gospel be preached plainly to the masses of the people. Let the adorable name of Jesus Christ be proclaimed in your street corners. In every place where you can have access to the sons of men let it be known that there is salvation in none other, but by Him all that believe shall obtain the forgiveness of sins.

Some would cover up the golden lamp with ceremonial observances, and others would hide it away under philosophical quibbles and theological jargon, but be it yours to be a “city set on a hill that cannot

be hid,” and what is said to you in secret that speak you in the light, what you learn in closets that publish you aloud upon the housetops! Lift up the beacon that it may flame afar all over the land and across the sea, let the blaze of Gospel light flare out till dwellers in the utmost parts of the earth shall ask, “What is this light? From whence does it come?” and you shall answer, “It is the candlestick of the Lord once hidden among the peculiar people, but now set out before the nations in Christ Jesus, it was once concealed under type and emblem, but now made manifest by Him who speaks no more by parable, but tells us plainly of the Father.”

Note, next, that it was *a lamp of pure gold*. This is a fact of much significance. We are emphatically told that it was a “candlestick all of gold.” The major vessels of the tabernacle were all of gold, and this I think indicates that the lamp which God has kindled is of the most precious kind. The church, which may be said to represent this candlestick, is as God has made it, of pure gold. Those who are united together in the fellowship of the church of God on earth should be a holy people, precious in the sight of the Lord, as gold is precious among metals. There should be no admixture of dross and tin, no careless reception of carnal men and mere formalists, but those who are elect of God, precious in His sight and honorable. God’s chosen should be choice men.

The lamp which holds the golden light should itself be of gold. The Lord will not use an unholy church to be His light-bearer, and where there is an apostasy as to doctrine, an absence of spiritual life, or a defection as to holiness of conduct, He will not use such a church, lest His holy name be polluted among men. His candlestick is all of pure gold, His people are a “peculiar people,” “sanctified unto Himself,” “zealous of good works.” If any who seem to be religious delight themselves in sin, if they fail in purity, they have no power to give light, and because of their depravity they are as spots in our solemn feasts, and mists that dim the brightness of our shining.

Ungodly churches are not the candles of the Lord. If men find pleasure in unrighteousness, they exert an influence baneful as the shadow of death. How can light shine from them while they serve the prince of darkness? What a mercy it is that God has set up a church in the world, which shall bear testimony to His name, and shall scatter the light abroad, because His grace makes and keeps it “holiness unto the Lord”! Let us love the church of God. We must never think that any one congregation, or any thousand congregations, can comprise the whole of that church. It is not for us to say, “The temple of the Lord are we.” God forbid. He has a people scattered up and down throughout the whole earth, He has a remnant even amongst churches which err from the faith, who have still kept their garments unspotted from the world, “And they shall be mine, says the LORD, in the day when I make up my jewels.”

Let us pray for the church militant, the entire body of His elect, the redeemed of the Lord, the quickened of the Spirit, the called out ones, the true *ecclesiae*, the assemblies of the Lord, for these are they that are His candlesticks, standing in the open as a “city set upon a hill that cannot be hid,” holding forth the word of life, that all who see the church in its life, and the church in its testimony, may behold the light of God.

This wonderful candlestick, all of gold, you will observe, is *lit with golden oil*. Such is the expression used in our text. At the twelfth verse we read, “Which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves.” The quality of the oil is, doubtless, here commended, for I suppose it means the very best possible oil, of a rich golden color, and in value, in splendor, in purity, and in clearness excellent beyond all praise. This represents that precious doctrine, that golden truth, that fullness of Gospel grace which keeps alive the light of the church of God. Or may it not remind us of the Divine Spirit, who, coming into His church and imparting to her the golden oil of His graces and gifts, enables her to maintain her brilliance of testimony, and to scatter her light among the sons of men.

The Holy Spirit is also the flame by which the oil is kindled and made to burn and give its light, and thus we have truth on a blaze with sacred fervor, sound doctrine united with intense zeal, and all because the Spirit of truth is present and reveals Himself at the same time as the Spirit of power. We will say of this golden oil that it is the truth, the living and incorruptible Word of God. This is the oil which the

church must burn, and with this she must trim her lamps. No strange doctrines, no vain traditions, no scientific conjectures, no poetical reveries, no thoughts of men, no excogitations of human brains, but the revealed Word of God, the truth as Jesus Christ has given it to us, the truth as the Holy Ghost has revealed it in the sacred Book, the truth as He brings it home with divine power to our understanding and conscience. This it is that we must use, and we must take care that if we have it we empty it out of ourselves into the golden pipes, that they may never be without sacred oil to keep the flame alive.

Precious beyond all conception is the truth! God will not be served with falsehood, but in truth is His delight. Take care that you bring nothing here but the best of the best, nothing but the unadulterated olive oil of revelation. What blunders and mistakes we make in the management of our own business! Should not this make us very careful in doing the work of the Lord that we do it not in a slovenly manner, and so provoke Him to anger.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope we desire to be clean before God as to His truth. I pray you not to trifle with it. Never tack with the wind of public opinion, but watch if need be while the world lasts, and wait for the fulfillment of God's Word, and be sure that it shall surely come to pass. Though you may well be tolerant of error in others, since you are so liable to it yourselves, yet be jealous of your own hearts, and keep out of them every false doctrine. "Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." If there be any adulteration of the oil the lamps will burn but dimly, peradventure they will go out.

This golden lamp *shone with a sevenfold brightness*. There were seven lamps to this golden candlestick, and there were seven pipes to the seven lamps, and as some read it, there were seven pipes to each one of these lamps, so that it gave seven times the light that the old lamp of the temple ever gave. The suggestion has been hazarded that there were seven times seven pipes, and the Hebrew might allow of such a translation. At any rate, there was seven times more light given by this mystic lamp seen by Zechariah than had ever been given by the candlestick of the old dispensation. God has given us light enough to flood the world with day in the generous Gospel that is preached among all nations.

The light of the law all but blinded the dim eyes of the Jew, but oh, the light of the Gospel! How it has sometimes overpowered all our senses! Saul of Tarsus tells us that about noon, suddenly there shone a great light round about him, and he fell to the earth. So, too, many of us can testify, that when the glory of God in the salvation of a lost sinner first flashed upon our souls we were so amazed that no strength remained in us. "Dissolved by His goodness we fell to the ground, and wept to the praise of the mercy we found." Overpowering was the effect when the brilliance of Gospel light beamed upon our weak eyes at first, and even now, though the Lord has strengthened our spiritual sight, so that we rejoice in the light, it is still at times more than we can bear. What a glory it has!

Vain men ask us to delight ourselves with the sparks they have kindled! Let it suffice that our light renders all the flashes of natural joy things too dim to notice. They tell us of something new they have thought up. To their apprehension, no doubt, it seems very wonderful. They may strike their matches and light their candles, if they will, we are more than satisfied with the eternal sun. You may bring your ancient lamps from Rome, you may fetch your tapers from Oxford and the Anglican imitators of Rome, but the lamp which the Holy Ghost has kindled by the Divine Word is better than all the glare of antichrist.

This despised Book has seven times more light than all the Solons of antiquity or all the *savans* of modern times. There is none like it. Only have eyes to see it, and you shall rejoice in this light. It is the light of God Himself. Spread it then if you have it, and let it shine in your families, let it shine on the town or city where you dwell, let it shine all over the earth, for there is no such light as the light of the eternal Gospel, "the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Oh that all saw it, and loved it, and lived in it.

II. Thus have I spoken about the wonderful lamp. Now, I ask those of you who love the study of God's Word to follow me a little in considering the description that is given of THE COMPLETE MACHINERY, THE PERFECT APPARATUS, PROVIDED FOR THIS LAMP.

If you notice, it was a “Candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.” We do not read anything about pipes and bowls in the old temple lamp. I suppose that each one of its seven lights had to be fed distinctly and separately by the officiating priest with a separate portion of oil, but in this case there seems to have been a bowl at the top of the seven branches into which the golden oil first entered, and from which it flowed out again, and thus each of the branch lights was fed.

At any rate, you see that a complete apparatus was provided and is described. The details are given. The pipes, bowl, and so on were all arranged with exquisite precision. Correspondingly in the church of God we ought to pay much attention to detail. I do not think we look to it half as much as we should. If the lamps are to be kept trimmed, you must attend to the pipes, and you must see to the golden oil. We ought each man to think, “Now, I have something to do to keep this candlestick in proper order, I have something to do with keeping this lamp burning.”

One man may be compared, as it were, to the bowl because he yields much of the light of intelligence and instruction, communicating knowledge and counsel to the church of God, another is a pipe to the Sunday school, and yet another golden pipe runs to the young men’s class, one is a pipe to the poor and ignorant in the streets, another to the sick, another is a golden pipe to those who are at home with their families. There is some point to which each one in Christ’s church may help to conduct the golden oil to keep the blessed flame of truth ever burning in this dark world.

I want you, brethren and sisters, to look one and all of you after the details of church work. Especially in a church of such magnitude as this, with such a multiplicity of agencies, attention to detail is most requisite. What can one overseer do? What could twenty pastors do? It is impossible if you leave this work entirely to us that it will ever be properly discharged. Oh no. Let each member have its own office in the body, even as each pipe had its own oil to carry to the one light of the candlestick which it had to supply. Do not get out of your place, do not interfere with other people’s service, do your own work, and see that it is well done, and then look over all the church and pray the Lord to supervise the whole, so that the golden bowl and the golden pipes may all be in full operation.

Of this machinery which is thus mentioned in detail there seems to have been an abundance. If there were seven pipes to each one of the lights of the lamp (and I think it was so), there could have been no lack of service. So, beloved friends, we must mind that the church in her machinery is ever kept abundantly supplied. We ought not to be slack in our labors nor scanty in our equipments. The everlasting Gospel should be promulgated with great energy and varied service. Little oil will mean little light, little grace will mean little work for God and little glory to His blessed name.

But let us endeavor to make every arrangement more effective. The light might not be extinguished even in one pipe, to the completeness of the divine design every light must be in good order. Be it our aim to keep the seven pipes constantly flowing and feeding so as to convey a sevenfold measure of oil, that the light may burn steadily on from hour to hour till the Lord comes.

This apparatus still further suggests to us *the idea of unity*. As I have already said, there were seven distinct lights to the old lamp of the Jewish sanctuary, and these could be individually filled, but here they are all one. One bowl is filled with oil, and from it the oil runs down the pipes to each of the lights. So is there unity in the church. We all suffer if one suffers, we are all the better if one is in a prosperous condition. No man lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. Though I speak of myself now as a fool, yet, it is true, if I decline in grace I injure all of you more or less, and you also in some measure exert a like influence upon me, though not to the same extent, because you do not occupy the same public station. Every member of the church who grows poor in grace impoverishes all the rest in some degree.

We act and react upon each other. I am sure the preacher can do injury to the hearer, and the hearer can in measure injure the preacher. Let your grace decline, and your prayerfulness be restrained, and the pastor must feel the loss and his ministry will bear melancholy evidence that the Spirit of God is not

witnessing mightily among us. So instead of one enriching the other we may by sinful neglect mutually endanger our prosperity, nay, we may beggar each other, and become partners in destitution and distress.

May it never be so with us, but may we ever prove ourselves to be a warm-hearted, loving, prayerful people, who are so glowing ourselves that we warm up those that are cold, and kindle fresh life in those that are expiring. Then if the whole congregation be consecrated to God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ gladdens them all, and they are filled with the fruits of righteousness, the minister can never be dull and drowsy, his heart will be aglow with sacred fervor, and his preaching will be resplendent with divine light and fire. The pews will respond to the pulpit. Fire will kindle to a flame, and the flame will kindle fresh fire. Vitality will promote revival, our tone will be spirited and inspiring. A breath from the four winds will make a stir among the dry bones, and an army shall presently arise. The force of sympathy shall be felt, and by free commerce in all holy gifts our commonwealth will flourish. Oh, may it be so. I know it is desirable, and I feel that it will be attained.

Nor is it merely for one church we are thus anxious, all the churches need the same consecration. If one church is dull it injures other churches. All the churches of Jesus Christ are really one, and as even my little finger cannot be ailing without my head suffering in consequence, so even the smallest church in the most remote village cannot decline without the entire body of the faithful, whether it is known to themselves or not, being losers thereby. Look you well then to every portion of the apparatus of this golden lamp, watch its details, keep it well trimmed and abundantly supplied, remember its unity, for with all its many pipes it is but one candlestick.

III. But the most remarkable disclosure in this vision was THE MYSTERIOUS SUPPLY BY WHICH THESE LAMPS ARE KEPT BURNING.

There were no priests to trim these lamps, nor is mention made of anyone being appointed to keep them in order. No golden snuffers nor golden snuff dishes were used, nor was any oil brought by any living man to replenish them. That is remarkable. Moreover there is no mention of oil being given by the people. The lamp in the temple was fed by the offerings of the people, they brought the best oil to keep the lamp perpetually burning before the altar. There is nothing of the kind here, that is not the way by which this oil gets to the lamp in the vision before us. Neither by priest nor people is it supplied. But how, then?

Why simply by a natural process without any machinery, for there are two olive branches, “Two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof,” and these trees in this vision empty the golden oil out of themselves through the two golden pipes, and so the marvelous lamp is kept supplied.

It is a very singular picture which is now before you, oil flowing directly from the living tree and at once creating light. Ordinarily, when the olive tree yields its berries, they must be taken to the mill and ground before oil can be produced. I have gone into the olive mill myself and seen the great stones crushing the berries, and I have seen the other processes by which the olive oil is prepared for the lamp, but there is no mention here of any mill, or press, or strainer, or jar, or bottle of oil. The food of this light does not come in that way at all, but the tree grows, and in a mysterious way imparts its fatness to the bowl from the pipe, and in this way the flame is fed.

Thus we are shown that the light of God is not dependent upon human will or human skill. It is an apt illustration of the text we were reading just now which lights up the whole chapter. “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” Not by your grinding out your oil by laboriously turning the mill of study, nor by your contributions of wealth, nor by your eloquence and logic, but by divine agency shall living men be raised up, and through these living men shall come the wondrous golden oil of grace, by which the lamp of testimony shall be kept bright, and the darkness of the world shall be overcome.

At first sight the provision may appear to be inadequate to the purpose. For God to make two olive trees grow by the side of the candlestick seems at first to be a deficient arrangement, because the trees stand out so separate from the lamp that we cannot perceive any connection between them. Had I beheld

that vision as the prophet saw it I feel I should have been as perplexed as he was. I should have said, "What be these?" I could not have made it out. Two olive trees growing by the side of a candelabrum! What connection can there be between them and it? But that is the very pith of the vision. You are to be shown the unique manner in which the Lord keeps His church burning and shining without mechanism. He simply raises up chosen men, perhaps only two, sometimes more, who live and grow, and in their life and growth they bring forth, by God's grace, as from their very souls, the sacred truth, the holy oil with which the lamp of God is kept burning.

I suppose that the two olive trees represent in this case Joshua, the high priest, of whom we read that his filthy garments were taken away, and he was clothed with change of raiment, and Zerubbabel, of whom we read in this chapter that his hands had laid the foundation, and his hands should finish the house. These were the two men whom God strengthened and enabled to set up a standard because of the truth. The Lord qualified them to build the temple that He might be glorified therein. Those two men by divine grace carried out the Lord's design, moving the people to the sacred service.

Joshua was made the ruler and teacher of the people, and Zerubbabel was promised that his hands should lay the top stone, as his hands had laid the foundation of the temple, and this, too, when Judah's lamp burned dim and her light was well-nigh gone out. These two, though they were nothing in themselves but godly men, who like living trees, brought forth fruit unto God, should be the means, according to the appointment of God, of keeping up the sacred testimony so long as they lived. Such means certainly appear insignificant in comparison with the magnificent result to be achieved. But that is God's way of working. He generally works by ones or twos, and when He uses two He couples them well.

In the missions of the Lord's ordaining we observe Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, Calvin and Luther, Whitefield and Wesley. Foolish persons rail at a one-man ministry, but what can they say against a two-man ministry? To the end of time there will be two witnesses, representative men will rise in pairs and do the work of the Lord, so as to arouse the whole church. Little as the world may think of them at the time, men do arise whose influence wonderfully displays the power of God, for they are made to stand like olive trees, and by some mysterious means it is through them that the lamp of God is kept burning continuously.

Of these two men I want you to notice two things. You wonder how it is that God should speak of them as keeping the lamp burning. He does so speak of them, for He says, "These are the two anointed ones, which stand by the Lord of the whole earth." First remember that they are able to do this because they stand before the Lord of the whole earth. Those whom God chooses to do His work stand as His servants in His sight, they could do nothing of themselves or by themselves, but their testimony comes from God, and their unction is of the Holy One, and they are clothed with divine energy, otherwise they would be weak as the rest of their brethren. Then be sure of this, that they have been anointed, they are said to be "anointed ones." We have no power to pour forth oil till we have been, ourselves anointed, it is not possible that we should feed the holy light until God has wrought in us the will of His own good Spirit. These men are said to have been filled with the Spirit of God, according to the sixth verse, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD."

There is Joshua, you can see him, he is clad in filthy garments! Is this the Lord's high priest? Is this he that is to instruct the people, the man who wears garments that are old, and soiled, and foul? Yes, that is the man. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts," and my Spirit shall rest upon this poor Joshua, this brand plucked out of the burning, and he shall teach my people. There is the other man over yonder—Zerubbabel. He is a poor, timid creature. It is the day of small things with him, he has but little confidence. God has to chide him and say, "Who has despised the day of small things?" But he is the man before whom the mountain shall become a plain, he is the man that shall build the temple of the Lord, because the Spirit of God shall be upon Him—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

You will always find that when God chooses men to do His work He makes it palpable to everybody that they are nothing but men. Sometimes they have imperfections over which we mourn very much, and over which they mourn far more than we do, but these manifest tokens of their infirmity show more distinctly the infinite skill of Him who uses such poor instruments. The frailty of the earthen vessels is made evident, that the excellence of the power which is of God and not of them may be the more conspicuous. So it is with God's work, for He will have it known that it is not by charm of eloquence, nor by force of reasoning, but by His Spirit, that He operates with resistless power, so He takes men, poor humble men, that seem no more able to trim the golden lamp than two olive trees would be, and He works by them to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Yet these men must be full of faith. "Who are you, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain." I doubt not that Zerubbabel grasped that promise, relied upon it, and rejoiced in it, and proved himself to be a man of faith. God will use us, whatever our faults are, if we have faith. I do not know what use He could make of any man who has no faith. Read the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, and notice on what strange men God set the seal of His approbation, because they had faith.

Samson may be quoted as an extreme case, speaking after the manner of men, we might have thought that God would have set him aside altogether, because there were such serious flaws in his character. Yet he was a great child-man, who, with all his faults, did believe in God, and perhaps believed more in God than many who were far better than he in other respects. With a thousand foemen before him, only think of that one man daring, through His confidence in God, to fling himself upon them all, with no weapon except a poor ass's jawbone. See, he leaps upon the crowd. "Heaps upon heaps. With the jawbone of an ass have I slain a thousand men." He never counted the odds. He just went at it, believing that God would help him, however tremendous the struggle might be.

So when they put him, blind as he was, into that huge temple of the Philistine gods, where everything was so strong and massive that it could bear up all the Philistine lords up there in the gallery, he begins feeling for the pillars, this poor blind man, whose hair had been shorn, and who had been made a prisoner by his bitter adversaries, feels for the huge columns, believing that God would enable him to snap them like reeds, or rock them to and fro as bulrushes.

Oh what a desperate and glorious tug was that! What a transcendent act of faith when he bowed himself with all his might, and pulled the structure down upon the heads of his oppressors! A glorious faith animated him. He was a poor specimen of propriety in many respects, queer stuff he was made of, but there was grandeur in his faith, and that saved him.

O my dear brother, if you can believe God, God can use you, but if you have no faith, or if you have but a weak, trembling faith, your unbelief will hinder the Lord, and it will be said of you, "God could not do many mighty works by him, because of his unbelief." Oh, if we could believe more implicitly, and venture to act more unreservedly on the certainty of the covenanted promises, what exploits we might achieve. The limit of our usefulness is narrowly set by our want of confidence in God. If we had more faith, the harvests we reap, which yield tenfold, might yield fiftyfold, or a hundredfold. With more faith the weakest of us might be as David, and David would be as the angel of the Lord. God grant us His grace that we may so believe, and rely upon His sure Word that we may become men fit for His use and profitable for His service.

One thing more is prominent and unmistakable about these men—these olive-tree men—that fed the lamp and kept it burning—they ascribed all their success to grace, for it is said that when the top stone of the temple should be brought out there should be shoutings of "Grace, grace, unto it." If souls are saved, it is always by a ministry of grace. Whatever else is left out in a soul-saving testimony there must be a clear ring as to grace. Election by the grace of the Father, regeneration by the grace of the Holy Ghost, remission of sins by the grace of God through the atoning blood of Jesus, grace beginning, continuing, and perfecting. I like the word "grace" even when it is coupled with an adjective and spoken of as "sovereign grace," "free grace," "effectual grace," and all those whom God will bless must be men

that love His grace, and feel His grace, and preach His grace, for this is the very essence of the golden oil by which the lamp is trimmed.

These men, or rather these trees, emptied out the golden oil “out of themselves.” They did not make the golden oil, it came into them by the miraculous power of God, the process was beyond nature. Men cannot create grace any more than trees could prepare oil themselves. Olive trees cannot distil oil without a press, nor can men be the means of grace to others unless God shall cause them so to be and then they empty out themselves to a good and gracious purpose.

Well, dear brethren, if you want to know how to be useful, one of the things that is absolutely necessary is that you empty yourselves out. Do you expect to give anything to another without losing it yourself? You will be mistaken. Take it as a general rule that nothing can come out of you that is not in you, and as the next general rule it takes something out of you to give something to other people. Paul said he did not merely wish to impart the Gospel to the people, but himself also. Though he did not preach himself, yet he was willing to spend and be spent so long as he could bring souls to Christ.

I believe the difference between the result of the labor of one man and another is often this, that one gives more out from himself than another. I am acquainted with some very learned brethren of mine who do not feed many people. They are huge barrels of learning, like the Heidelberg Tun, and they are full to the brim with the best liquor in the world, but never much comes out. On the other hand, I have never myself been anything but a very small kilderkin, but I let everything run out that is put into me. If you have not ten talents to boast of, turn the one talent you have over and over and over and over again, and you will make far more of it than if you let many talents lie still and rust. Take care that you are actively earnest in the cause of the Master, and a blessing will surely come out of it.

Oh how it shows the wisdom of God, and the power of God, when He makes simple means produce surprising results and by feeble instruments compasses His infinite forethoughts. God might have been glorified by doing the work Himself, as when of old He stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, speaking and it was done. But He is far more glorified by using poor, unworthy creatures for the accomplishment of His divine purposes.

When Quintin Matsys made the celebrated well-cover at Antwerp, it would have been highly creditable to him even if he had used the best of implements to make it with. When we are told, however, that his fellow workmen robbed him of his tools, and that he did it with one common hammer or some such instrument, our estimation of the artist’s skill is greatly enhanced.

It is no wonder that the Spirit of God can Himself convert souls, the wonder is that He converts men by us. That we who are so imperfect, and so feeble, should become channels of blessing is a great marvel. Those two olive trees might, it was feared, grow in the way of the light, but God made them to be its maintainers. The branches of our infirmity might hide the light from the people’s eyes if grace did not intervene and make every one of them yield its olives, and pour out its measure of oil for the supply of the golden candelabrum.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, if you have light, shed it, if you have grace, endeavor to impart it. The Lord has blessed you, ask Him to bless you more by His Holy Spirit. Let those olive trees, yielding abundance of oil, be your model, that your lively vigor may prove of lasting value to the church. So be the Lord with you henceforth and forever. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ZECHARIAH 4

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—972, 969, 971

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.